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NSC BRIEFING

5 January 1960

LAOS

- I. Laotian political scene characterized by fast-moving changes in past weeks.
 - A. The rivalry between Premier Phoui's old-line Rally of the Lao People (RLP) and the young reformist Committee for Defense of National Interests (CDNI) came to a head with Phoui's resignation on 31 December.
 - B. Increased CDNI activity against Phoui resulted from their exclusion from the cabinet he formed 15 December.
 - C. The army, acting under the King's authority, is now running the country pending formation of a new cabinet.
- II. One of army's first steps was decree that all acts of the National Assembly in its special session in mid-December were null and void.
 - A. This move reflects position of King and CDNI in their dispute with Phoui that assembly's mandate expired on 25 December and that assembly's efforts in the special session to extend its mandate were unconstitutional.
 - B. Way is now cleared for designation of a non-parliamentary coalition government pending national elections some time this year.
- III. The King has asked the army's five generals, three of whom are CDNI members, to draw up a list of prospective members of such a government.

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- A. The King and CDNI had originally planned to permit Phoui to return as premier, but mutual recriminations between the King and Phoui at time of his resignation have made this considerably more difficult.
 - B. CDNI in any case apparently prefers an experienced politician to a military man as premier, but it may have trouble finding someone who is both willing and acceptable to all groups.
- IV. Whatever cabinet emerges from the negotiations now in progress between the King and CDNI, and the RLP, the political balance of power in Laos has seemingly shifted to the CDNI.
- V. Constitutional matters have been in the forefront of the current crisis but basically the dispute has stemmed from the efforts of the CDNI to displace Phoui and his old-line followers as the ruling elite of Laos.
- A. Immediate stake is a decisive voice in determining who will run on a hoped-for unified conservative slate in the national elections.
 - B. CDNI's distaste for members of the outgoing assembly, whom it accused of being corrupt, too remote from people, and of lacking dynamism, was a root cause of its insistence that the assembly die on 25 December.
- VI. In view of the serious lack of leaders and administrators in Laos, both the CDNI and the RLP are probably needed in the government, and the important thing is for both groups to get back in harness together before the government's anti-Communist efforts suffer further.

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VII. [REDACTED] have expressed concern over present CDNI ascendancy, with its military coloration.

A. They fear CDNI might order an early trial of Prince Souphannouvong and other pro-Communist leaders, or take some other equally provocative step.

25X6A B. [REDACTED] such rash action might rekindle internal Communist insurgency, now relatively quiet, and invite countermeasures from North Vietnam or Communist China.

VIII. North Vietnam has called on the Lao people to unite and struggle against the CDNI which it brands an instrument of U. S. imperialism. It has charged the Laotian army with recent border violations and warns these will have "disastrous consequences."

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